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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an ongoing collaborative school evaluation program that involves a partnership of different stakeholders in southwestern England. Participants include student teachers, serving teachers, local authority representatives, and university teachers/researchers. The discussion demonstrates the ways in which school evaluation, based on a collaborative action research model, can be used as a strategy for policy articulation and change. The purpose of the program was to evaluate the implementation of the Devon Curriculum Development Project (DCDP) policy in schools; an outcome of the evaluations was the generation of a climate for change. Features of the collaborative action research process that facilitated the outcomes included teacher ownership of evaluations, a partnership with objective outsiders, and a focus on pupil perceptions. (22 references) (LMI)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE, SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM EVALUATION

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE, SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM EVALUATION

ABSTRACT

Qualitative, collaborative school-based curriculum evaluation offers an approach to school improvement that rests upon different groups of stakeholders in education engaging in systematic reflection upon their own practice. This paper gives an account of an ongoing programme of collaborative school evaluation which involves student teachers, serving teachers, local authority representatives and university teacher/researchers working in partnership in schools across a geographical region in the South West of England. The discussion focuses on a number of completed school-based projects and describes ways in which the evaluations contributed to changes in school curriculum policy and practice. A consideration of the use of collaborative action research as an approach to implementing change in schools concludes the discussion.

Introduction

The origins of the programme stem from the early days of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and the involvement of the University of Exeter in the evaluation of one of the first pilot schemes. The TVEI in England and Wales, described by Gleeson (1989) as 'perhaps the major curricular innovation since the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1960s' (p 76), is a scheme whereby local education authorities receive central government grants for approved programmes of technical, vocational and related education for fourteen to eighteen year olds in schools and colleges (see Dale et al, 1990). It was set up in 1983 as a series of pilot schemes designed to implement contrasting models of curriculum development in schools and to promote new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The terms

'technical' and 'vocational' were to be interpreted broadly; incorporating a number of cross-curricular interrelated themes, with a strong emphasis on the development of active teaching and learning strategies. The scheme was extended in 1987 with the eventual intention of becoming available to all fourteen to eighteen year olds in state maintained schools and colleges, irrespective of ability.

An important thrust of the university evaluation of this particular pilot scheme was to provide feedback for participating schools, based on pupil perceptions of ongoing curriculum developments in which teachers were actively engaged. A local TVEI management structure was set up, the central component of which was a TVEI project team comprised of teacher representatives from each of the particpating schools. This arrangement provided the means of bringing together teachers, university staff and student teachers in a collaborative approach to a style of evaluation, the essence of which was to provide feedback that would inform and help shape ongoing practice.

The university is now contracted to the Local Authority to promote collaborative action researach as an approach to curriculum development and policy implementation within the context of the TVEI Extension, renamed the Devon Curriculum Development Project (DCDP). The region is divided into consortia, each with a full-time consortium co-ordinator who liaises with the DCDP co-ordinators in the schools. Thus, the immediate context of the evaluation projects in the participating schools concerns the impact of the DCDP on the curriculum, in particular concerning approaches to learning and teaching, and on the relationship of the DCDP to the implementation of the National Curriculum following the 1988 Education Reform Act.

The Evaluation Model

The main emphasis in the Exeter model is on school-based curriculum evaluation as a basis for critical reflection for both serving and student teachers, using the notion of 'reflection' as critical inquiry in the sense expressed by Weiss and Louden (1989) in their analysis. In most cases of the application of reflective practice in teacher education the emphasis is placed on classroom teaching as a research activity. For example, Schon (1983; 1987) uses the notions of 'knowledge-in-action' and 'reflection in action' in articulating the role of reflective enquiry in professional practice. For Schon, reflection in action is a form of enquiry in which reflecting, knowing and doing are inseparable. Similarly, Stenhouse (1975) used the idea of teacher as researcher in his conception of teachers' professionalism. For Stenhouse, professional development was related to the opportunity for teachers to study their own practice through systematic reflection and research. The emphasis in this programme is on formative curriculum evaluation at the level of policy and its implementation. Tickle (1987) identifies three levels of school life which need to be viewed and understood and at which it is possible to conceive of issues for study and inquiry. These he identifies as the immediate classroom level where the emphasis is on matters of direct classroom practice, the institutional level where the emphasis is on matters which bear directly upon classroom practice or part of a teacher's wider professional responsibility, and a cultural level where the emphasis is on values and beliefs implicit in the curriculum and which pervade practice. The model described here applies primarily to the institutional and classroom levels of inquiry and analysis, and the interplay between them.

The notion of reflective practice is also seen in an action research context. A broad conception of action research is adopted, which includes related activities such as reflective teaching, curriculum evaluation and

change. Referring specifically to a learning-to-teach context, Wallace (1987) defines action research as:

> the process through which teachers collaborate in evalulating their practices jointly, raising awareness of their personal theory; articulate a shared conception of values; try out new strategies to render the views expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse; record their work in a form which is readily available and understandable to other teachers; and thus develop a shared theory of teaching by researching practice. (p 105)

In a similar vein, Bonser and Grundy (1988), following Kemmis and McTaggart (1981), see the action research process as a 'systematic one which entails a cyclical interrelationship of moments of planning, acting, observing and reflecting' (p 37); a spiral of discovery of meaning which is seen as central to practical deliberation (Schwab 1969) about curriculum change and development, with clear implications for practice. In relation to their own research, they describe the action research process in terms of a 'procedural guide for researchers, teachers and others interested in data-gathering as an initial step towards the construction of curriculum policy' (Bonsor and Grundy, 1988, p 39). The spiral involved four cycles, each forming a different phase of meaning making, starting with the individual level of planning, data production and reflective deliberation, through small group and a whole group level, to a level of all personnel within the institution. This process of a widening dissemination of the action research process, from a small group level to the whole institution, is also a key feature in the model of school-based evaluation discussed here, as also are the key ideas of collaboration, raising awareness, researching and changing practice.

The Participants

The programme involves groups of up to twelve student teachers, working in collaboration with university tutors and teachers in the schools. The student teachers' involvement in the evaluation programme is built into their overall initial teacher education course and contributes to their final degree assessment. It is described as a school-based project in which the main emphasis is on evaluating teaching and learning in classrooms in collaboration with, and alongside, experienced teachers. The school projects also provide opportunities for student teachers to be involved in looking at ways in which change may be implemented in schools and classrooms. From the teachers' perspective the student teachers make a valuable contribution in collecting data from a variety of sources, and preparing project reports on the evaluation outcomes. The style of the evaluation, and the methods used for collecting data, are the outcome of negotiation among students, teachers and the university tutor. Models and mechanisms of collaboration, of bringing all interested parties together, of managing and arranging contact with pupils, are negotiated and take shape as part of the evaluation process, and emerge in response to the needs and opportunities the process generates. One of the teachers from the school acts as a link teacher, whose main task is to liaise with the university tutor in helping to set up and facilitate the evaluation in the school. The university tutor, and the school link teacher, are seen as playing crucial roles in managing and co-ordinating the process as a whole.

Before the commencement of the evaluations, the link teachers and student teachers are given a set of guidelines for organising the evaluation, which establishes a basic framework, related to a timescale, within which to formulate and conduct each school-based project. The guidelines specify the kinds of tasks that need to be performed, in sequence, for the satisfactory completion of the project. The stages described in the guidelines offer a

working definition of the research process underlying the project. The research process is conceived as a form of action research, defined as a process of planning, observing and data collecting, reflecting and acting. The process of reflection is highlighted and brought into clear focus in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Programme Evaluation

The evaluation of the collaborative action research programme presented here rests upon eight school projects completed during the school year, 1990-1991. The focus of the evaluation is on the teachers' participation in the collaborative evaluation process. The main argument is that, through engaging in collaborative reflection on their own classroom practice, teachers are given a basis for articulating their interests and concerns about their teaching and relationships with pupils in relation to broader policy issues within the school. It is further argued that this kind of discourse that relates classroom practice to school policy provides a context in which questions of curriculum development and change may be interpreted, and reinterpreted. In this kind of model, change is not seen as being imposed on teachers; rather it is seen as being reshaped and redefined by them in relation to a reappraisal of their own practice. The argument is that, in this way, change is brought about by a process of accommodation whereby new measures become incorporated into teachers' working practices in the school and classroom. The involvement of outside collaborators in the form of the university tutor and student teachers are shown to be important elements in the overall model. They carry out the evaluations in the sense of collecting data and producing a final report, but the teachers determine the issues and retain overall control. The 'outsiders' bring, in the perceptions of the teachers, a sense of impartiality to the exercise, but the evaluation remains

within the ownership of the teachers. The analysis suggests that this retention of control and sense of ownership are powerful factors in the process of accepting as valid the outcomes of the evaluation, and in accommodating changes that are felt by the teachers to be changes that will improve and enhance their classroom practice. The argument is based on the analysis of data from various sources, including open-ended interviews with link teachers, informal discussions with other teachers involved, policy documents produced by the schools, the evaluation reports completed at the end of each project, and teachers' responses to the reports.

This view of the importance of ownership and control in the management and implementation of change is supported elsewhere in the school improvement literature. For example, Reynolds, Davie and Phillips (1989), in their evaluation of a school improvement project concerned with the implementation of school effectiveness research, highlight as one of the factors in the success of the project the ownership of organizational changes by teachers in the schools. Similarly, Fullan (1991), cites the observations of Louis and Mills (1990) that, while initiative for change comes from different sources, 'when it comes to implementation, power sharing is crucial' (p 83).

The central theme that school improvement happens because teachers are enabled, and are able, to shape the way policy is implemented is articulated through the analyses and ordering of the data around the following three fundamental questions:

1. What were the issues that gave focus to the evaluations; how were they identified and subsequently refined; and who were involved in the process?
2. How did the teachers in schools generally, and in particular those directly involved, respond to and perceive the evaluation?

3. What were the outcomes of the evaluation; and what policy changes were perceived as necessary as a result of the evaluation?

Question one relates to the opportunity the teachers were given in defining the issues and determining the shape of the evaluation. Question two relates to the teachers' perceptions of, and engagement in, the evaluation model. Question three relates to the use made of both the process and the product of the evaluations in informing deliberations about policy and practice.

Defining the Issues

The overall programme is set in the context of the implementation of the Devon Curriculum Development Project (DCDP), and the link teachers were, in the main, the designated DCDP co-ordinators for the schools. All the school co-ordinators had attended a two day conference on school evaluation at the university, and so had some knowledge of the evaluation model being offered and an understanding of what the process would entail:

> The idea of an evaluation project with the university first came to me when I was at the DCDP conference. I was quite taken by the idea of students coming into school that I followed you out at lunchtime to ask you if we could have a project at our school. The main purpose for me at the beginning was, because I had just become the DCDP co-ordinator, and I thought that this sounded as if it might be really helpful for our review and evaluation purposes. (School link teacher)

Each project started either with an approach to the university from the school, or through a process of initial negotiation between the university and particular schools. No school was formally required to set up a project with the university, but all schools were expected to develop formative styles of evaluation as an approach to curriculum evaluation in the context of implementing the DCDP. The importance of a non-coercive approach needs to be stressed. Giving teachers a choice in working in this way enabled a sense of

partnership to become a reality in the working relationships within the model. However, of equal importance is the role of the school link teacher in carrying the participation with the university forward. In practice, each link teacher worked with a core of teachers in the school or college to determine the aims of their particular projects. The significance of these two elements of co-operation and involvement are illustrated in the following extracts from the link teacher interviews:

> The people who were involved were the people who had an interest and who made it work, and also people who were personally concerned. What I mean is we didn't get someone to do the evaluation with you; they were people who are interested and part of the school, and who really wanted to know what is happening here.

> What we identified as an institution were our broad aims for the project. These were given to the group from the university very early on and they turned the original material into about four clear areas that they felt were feasible.

> We had a management team meeting at which we discussed the project and what we wanted from it, and as a result of that we got it on the agenda. Once we had got the broad idea I then went back to discuss it with the teachers and the university to see how we could narrow it down in terms of forms of questions.

Whilst the initial focus for the projects arose out of particular questions, raised by teachers, about curriculum practice and policy within the schools, they were also, in most cases, related to a perceived need to initiate change:

> We were testing some of the comments from the staff about GCSE kids being marvellous but not knowing anything. Or about kids getting lost in the place. So what we were using the evaluation for in a sense was to see the reality behind these sorts of folk lore kind of things that were being said so that we could have some evidence from the kids themselves that may, or may not, support what the staff were saying. And in that way we were building up a kind of atmosphere in which change could take place.

Elliott (1991), in discussing the main characteristics of collaborative inquiry in schools, argues that:

> A felt need, on the part of practitioners to initiate change, to innovate, is a necessary precondition of action research. It is the feeling that some aspect(s) of a practice need to be changed if its aims and values are to be more fully realized, which activates this form of inquiry and reflection. (p 53)

Elliott further makes the point that, within this kind of educational enquiry, 'theoretical abstraction plays a subordinate role in the development of practical wisdom grounded in reflective experiences of concrete cases' (p 53). The kinds of evaluation questions raised by teachers, which ranged from those concerned with aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom to whole school policy issues such as equal opportunities and the development of self-supported study, reflect the concern with the daily working practices of teaching to which Elliott refers. Such concerns are evident in the interviews with the link teachers, concerns which were often expressed as hunches, or simple hypoetheses about some aspect of school practice, or questions concerned with merely 'finding out':

What we are trying to do is to build up a picture of what is actually happening to the pupils, and to see what their needs are. And so with the evaluation we have identified the whole thing about the importance of induction and progression. We have never had a complete picture of these processes before.

There was a clear purpose to the evaluation. It was to look at the tutorial system operating within the college, and to make some observations about that, using the students from the university as non-participant observers. We wanted to look at content, relationships and constraints, both on the tutors and on the tutees.

We were interested in seeing how the resources for information technology were increasing the quality of the children's learning and experience, and this concern remained a constant throughout the project.

Initially the issues were expressed in very general terms which, in the majority of cases, determined the broad parameters for the evaluation. The process of refining, and reformulating, the issues into more specific evaluation briefs evolved through often rather complex process of negotiation between the university tutor, the school and the student teachers. This process of refining and reformulating 'in situ' once a commitment had been made sharpened up concerns and raised awareness amongst the teachers of those areas of investigation for which no tangible evidence existed to review whether policy expectations were being met in practice. An example of this is shown in the feedback given, in the form of an interim report, to the staff in one of the evaluation projects:

Over the period of the evaluation a number of key issues of thematic importance were identified, changed and refined. In response to the Interim Report, the evaluation team was requested to focus on lesson length in relation to pupil motivation, and the use of pupil time in the resource areas.

The eight projects involved two colleges of further education, with two projects based in one of them, five co-educational comprehensive schools, (officially named community colleges) and one co-educational secondary modern school. All the projects related to the fourteen to eighteen years age group. Each evaluation project focused upon a particular theme, but within each theme a number of areas of particular interest and concern were identified. The main themes of the projects were as follows:

PROJECT 1 - College of Further Education:

The transition from school to college, with particular reference to approaches to learning and teaching.

PROJECT 2 - College of Further Education:

Progression from school to college and the provision of guidance and counselling within the college.

PROJECT 3 - College of Further Education:

The development of tutorial work within the college with reference to an evaluation of the tutorial system in operation.

PROJECT 4 - 11-18 Coeducational Comprehensive School:

Changes in classroom practice in the context of the relationship between the Devon Curriculum Development Project and the National Curriculum.

PROJECT 5 - 11-18 Coeducational Comprehensive School:

The introduction and implementation of Health Education as a cross-curricular theme within the context of the National Curriculum.

PROJECT 6 - 11-16 Coeducational Comprehensive School:
Teaching and learning styles across the curriculum.

PROJECT 7 - 11-16 Coeducational Secondary Modern School:
The infuence of the Devon Curriculum Development Project funded science and technology suite in the school on science teaching and on the motivation of less able and potentially disruptive pupils.

PROJECT 8 - 11-18 Coeducational Comprehensive School:
Teaching and learning styles, with particular reference to the emphasis in the official policy of the school upon less formal and traditional classroom practice.

These examples show the wide range of issues identified within the schools, but more especially they reflect the concern shared across all institutions with curriculum processes that relate either directly or indirectly to the quality of relationships and learning experiences within the classroom. Of particular significance was the emphasis that was placed on gaining pictures of the reality of school life as perceived by the pupils themselves, and the value placed on the pupils' perceptions as a basis for the teachers to raise questions about their own practice. In a review of the findings of school effectiveness research, Reynolds (1991), in discussing the causes of school effects, points to the findings of studies using multi-level modelling which show that the 'great majority of variation between schools is in fact due to classroom variation' (p 95) and that, in comparison, the effect of the school is relatively small.

Access to classroom practice and investigations into how it can be improved are fundamental for helping schools to be more effective in achieving educational outcomes. The model adopted in this evaluation can be seen, in this context, as a complement to the more quantitative school effectiveness research studies. The evidence suggests that it provides a framework in which teachers can reflect upon their own practice with a view to improving it.

To summarise, the early identification of evaluation issues, and their subsequent refinement, were the outcome of negotiation and collaboration between students and groups of teachers. They were not, in the main, decided by the dictate of particular people in positions of authority, although getting the projects started involved working with management groups within the schools. But it is important to note that the issues grew out of the concerns of particular groups of teachers who shared an interest in being involved in evaluating some aspect of their school and classroom practice.

Teacher Engagement in the Evaluation Process

Overall, the level of commitment of the teachers was high. Much seemed to rest on their view of the role of the 'outsiders' in the projects. It is clear that they saw the students as playing an important role in the evaluation process. Their understandings of the students' contributions were related to questions concerning issues of impartiality in the collection and analysis of the data, the evaluation not being perceived as a threat, and making time available for evaluation activities. Numerous studies (see, for example, Reynolds, 1989; Elliott, 1991; Simons, 1987) have identified issues such as lack of time, lack of control over the research process, teachers' resistance to the intrusion of others in their classrooms, as problems in the facilitation of self-reflective research and evaluation in schools. There was clear evidence in the link teacher interviews that the presence of students as active and involved collaborators in the schools helped to alleviate such problems. This strongly held view of data collecting exercises needing to be impartial and free from value judgment, was clearly illustrated in one of the link teacher's response to a question concerned with perceptions of the validity of such data:

> I think it is valid for the fact that, first of all, you are external people and therefore you are actually coming in to look at something, and therefore you don't carry the distrust that would be given to somebody internally who would be seen to be giving bias in their favour against someone else.

Another link teacher, in response to the same question, drew attention to the non-threatening nature of the data in that they were focused on school and classroom processes, and not on the personalities or inferred strengths and weaknesses of particular individuals:

> The data actually talked about student and staff perceptions of what they liked and disliked, and why they thought certain things were attractive or effective. And because it actually listened to people, the data give a picture of school life on particular issues. And that makes it very formative because it is not threatening because you see yurself as much tied up in the processes as everybody else.

The teachers who showed resistance to the idea of the evaluation were those who were locked into a predominantly traditionalist view of teaching: who demonstrated a strong adherence to what Elliott (1991) refers to as the traditional craft culture of school life. This was raised as an issue by some of the link teachers, in particular in the context of the evaluation exercise being seen as a way of initiating change within the school:

> Unfortunately you often find that it is the more proactive members of staff who want to get involved. As I said to you initially, we had a staff meeting with reference to this project, which was very well attended. And its the members of staff who you would want to get to take part because of their intransigent nature that you don't get coming forward to these things. People whose perceptions and attitudes you want to actually change, you find them very reserved and resistant to this kind of activity.

> It is fair to say that some of the teachers who were involved had some reservations about observations and interviews, and about talking to students about their classroom practice and performance. They are the sort of people who have a particular view of teaching and of how to deal with children. They are not very receptive to change.

However, there was evidence that being a part of, or merely aware of, the project, though not being centrally involved, did promote changes in those teachers who had shown some initial resistance to the idea of the evaluation. Whether this was likely to happen or not seemed to rest primarily on the extent to which the data were seen as useful in providing what was perceived as reliable and valid feedback about their own practice:

> I've stopped being threatened by anybody else looking at things, and I think that's great, because we all do feel a bit threatened at some point. I don't feel it any more. I don't see this as a threat, and I don't now see any other evaluation as a threat either. I think it has cured me of worrying about that and just seeing the helpful side of it. And I think this applies to some of the other staff as well.

Another link teacher, in discussing how she worked at getting the project underway in her school, gave the following illustration of this rather sensitive issue in response to a question concerning how she tried to involve a particular member of staff in the project:

> I didn't push the idea of the project at all. I told them about it in the staff meeting, and I told individuals about it in the resources and information technology centre, and the library area. But he wasn't happy so I said there was absolutely no pressure whatsoever. I told him what was going to happen and that the students from the university would perhaps interview pupils and so on. But he obviously preferred to do it himself, or that his own views would count for much more, or that what

> others might say wouldn't be relevant, or that it was a threat. But now he is much easier on that score, and I am sure that if we had another project there would be no problems here.

This observed tendency for teachers to adopt a more favourable attitude towards this kind of evaluation after having some experience of it emerged as a fairly pervasive perception, and was clearly a factor in schools where the programme had run for more than a year:

> When you do something like this the first time in an institution like ours, and you are using people from outside; I mean, we've now got over a number of problems and people have moved on in their own thinking haven't they. The people who last year on that team would have been sort of vaguely anti it, but they are not now because times have changed and they have developed.

The emphasis throughout the programme is upon different groups of participants working in collaboration with one another and sharing in certain key principles concerning the purpose and nature of the evaluations. Of these, to be open-minded, questioning about one's own practice and values, and to have the ability to accept criticism, were the most significant in establishing a firm basis for this kind of reflective evaluation to take root in the school. But such groups do not see themselves in isolation from the rest of the school, and the evidence shows a concern to keep others constantly informed of what is happening. As one link teacher commented:

> And the whole staff knows what's going on because, you know, we advertise it and we make it a very prestigious situation.

Another important issue, already referred to, in bringing together the university and teachers from the schools, was the question of ownership of, and control over, the projects. In one sense the teachers felt that the

involvement of the university, mainly through the use of students, brought a measure of objectivity to the research. This was also seen in the context of forming a working partnership between the schools and the university, a partnership in which all participants had both something to give, and something to gain. Within this kind of working atmosphere it was the teachers who felt they had the most important say in shaping the direction of the evaluation. They determined the agenda, arranged access for the students to classrooms, pupils, teachers and other sources of information and data. This sense of collegiality is well expressed in the following comment made by one of the link teachers:

> The people who have come here have been so friendly and so willing to negotiate, and being here to do what we wanted to do, so that they were not imposing anything on us. And they were flexible. They were insiders. They belonged here. They were part of the school, and a part of the team.

This concern to make the evaluation objective through involving outsiders, while still retaining control of the direction and use of the projects, is further illustrated in the following comments from three of the link teachers:

> From the school point of view, we wanted to use objective observers. People in the school are very close to what they do. We work very much as a team and we are very closely initiated into all the things we have done, and we wanted to have somebody from outside the institution.

> That was the first criterion, to come in and have a look and to objectively report on what they saw. Secondly, we wanted to get some feedback from our own children. We thought it was very important that people who sit in closed rooms, and have all these wonderful ideas, and spend money on resources, should see what sort of benefit the children are deriving from it all.

> For me getting teachers to reflect individually is not enough. You want to see the growth of good practice in all parts of the college and for all students. So there is a sense in which you want to create an atmosphere in which issues about good practice can be raised, and you spread that around the college. It is not enough for me to have members of staff individually reflecting just on their own practice. In a sense I want to get everybody collectively thinking like that. That's why it is so helpful having independent people, people from outside, coming in.

In summary, the teachers' positive response to the collaborative action research process appears to rest on their view of the other contributors, the student teachers and the university tutors, in the model. Across all the projects the students were perceived by teachers to be impartial, offering an outsider perspective that was non-threatening. This arrangement was positively welcomed by the teachers as a great deal of information was capable of being collected which would have been impossible without the student involvement.

Programme Outcomes

Because this kind of action research based formative evaluation is concerned with generating understanding at the level of meaning, attempting to classify and quantify particular outcomes is problematic. In this study the focus of interest is on changes in teacher perception, and from the evidence it is possible to identify outcomes in three broad categories: changes in perception concerning the nature and purpose of collaborative evaluation in schools; changes in teachers' perceptions and understandings of their own practice; changes in teachers' perceptions and understandings concerning general school issues. These three 'types' of outcome are analytic categories; in practice they are interrelated in teachers' thinking and planning about their own, and others', practice. This is illustrated in the following extract from the

transcript of an interview with a school link teacher:

Interviewer:

I want to talk about changes in the school that came about as a result of the evaluation, though I know that these may be difficult to isolate. But there is a feeling around the school that it helped, and that it had some impact but not transformed anything. Were there any changes in practice and policy?

Link Teacher:

Now one of the interesting ones was the gut reaction amongst some staff that there was a lot of time wasted when the pupils were unsupervised in the resources area. But they couldn't find any evidence that this was in fact happening. In fact the evidence showed that they were being very purposeful about why they were there, apart from the inevitable chit chat among friends. So the issue was dropped.

Interviewer:

What other changes were there?

Link Teacher:

Well, there was the contention of lesson length. The evaluation was the final stamping ground for this and it helped us to reach the conclusion that we should change that. And then there was the gender problem. The evaluation made a number of interesting points about differences between boys' and girls' preferred teaching styles. It also indicated a lack of preparation amongst the boys. In other words they were shown to be very lacking in their planning and in certain core skills that can enable them to become independent learners.

Interviewer:

Would you say that the teachers are in the process of changing their approach to teaching, or that they have a slightly different conception of their role as a teacher in trying to promote independent learning, and that somehow their model of teaching is being reshaped?

Link Teacher:

No, I would disagree. I think the problem we are coming up against, vis-a-vis the attitude and teaching role we have already adopted, is that the boys are finding it difficult to relate to what we are expecting of them. And your evaluation has shown that we therefore spend far more time talking to the boys than we do to the girls, because the girls have got much better work habits.

Interviewer:

And are you saying that the staff are not actually conscious of this at the time, and that the evaluation helped to bring the issue out into the open? And do you think they change as a result of that, through being more aware of what is happening?

Link Teacher:

I think some of them make the effort, but I think we are now coming around to the conclusion that we've got to have some kind of remedial package for the boys. In other words we've got not to assume that these skills will develop in the boys as they do develop almost automatically amongst the girls as they become more mature. We have to compensate for this and therefore we are actually going to try next term to spend two or three days very much concentrating on this problem with our new intake. That is, we are having no timetable for three days, but use the time to try and teach skills about being independent learners and see whether they will have any effect. Another suggestion is that our institution might need to look at areas where boys of that age could experience a sense of achievement.

Interviewer:

So all this discussion has become more highlighted through the evaluation, but not necessarily brought about by it?

Link Teacher:

Well yes, the issues have become highlighted, though obviously we were aware that our examination results for the girls were quite incredibly better than for the boys. The HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) in their report on the school confirmed this, and also confirmed that it wasn't unique to our establishment, that they had come across it in other establishments, and that it could well be culturally determined, which we disagreed strongly with. We felt it was something to do with levels of maturity related to being independent in a school with a growing emphasis on independence in the curriculum.

Interviewer:

I think it is difficult for many young people to come to terms with making decisions for themselves, and having the self-discipline to do this. At a more individual level, in particular regarding your colleagues, did any of them, for example on reading the report which focuses very centrally upon things in which they are involved, change in any way? Is there any suggestion, or any sense that you might have, that being engaged in the evaluation caused them to reflect on their own practice in such a way that enabled them to see things slightly differently, to make sense of things differently, to relate to their students differently?

Link Teacher:

Well yes, I think this has happened to a certain extent. The process you describe is going on all the time, but in a very informal way. This evaluation makes it more formal. Another of the areas which I felt was crucial, and something we hadn't even thought about before, was the mismatch revealed in the evaluation between curriculum development and independent learning on the one hand, and the pastoral system, which we thought was very supportive, but was completely the opposite, on the

> other. The feeling coming from the students is that, you know, we are mature enough in the classroom to negotiate what we are doing, but on the pastoral side we have all these rules, and they feel that there is not sufficient debate and discussion about them. And that was very interesting because there is a tension between the two, and it is something we should be looking at, particularly as we have got smaller as an institution. Our view was that we had merged the two organisations, the pastoral and the academic, into one. In other words, there is nothing about the life of the school as it affects the students that is non-negotiable, even to getting open debate about the rules.

This extract is an interesting example of the interplay of different levels of reflecting, interpreting and acting, this kind of action research enquiry is capable of generating. Zeichner and Liston (1987) identify three levels of reflection in professional practice: the technical, in which the emphasis is on the application of means to achieve desired and predetermined ends; the contextual, in which the emphasis is on institutional and structural constraints and their influence on practice; critical, in which the emphasis is on a questioning of the values that underpin practice. Similarly Tripp (1991), in using the notion of 'interpretation' in preference to 'reflection', offers four kinds or levels of interpretation: practical, which is made instantly in the practice of teching; explanatory, which makes use of professional knowledge to explain practical interpretations; reflective, which involves a consideration of the values that inform and shape practical decisions and their explanations; critical, which involves questioning the values revealed through reflective interpretation. Both formulations rest on an essentially non-technocratic conception of professional practice, and each suggests a hierarchy of levels of reflection and interpretation, though it is

not clear whether this assumes that deliberations about professional matters progress from the lower to the higher levels. Although an important impetus for making sense of and understanding the world around us is the concern to improve our performance in the practical activities in which we are engaged, the relationship between such levels of reflecting and interpreting is essentially dialectical in nature. Whilst, in this extract, critical discourse is implicit rather than explicit, there is an analysis that relates problems in classroom practice concerning gender issues and independent learning to structural constraints located in the pastoral and academic systems of the school. The cultural explanation of gender differences in achievement offered by HMI is rejected in favour of an explanation that is grounded in the teachers' collective experience of classroom practice within the school, and their reflections upon that experience. Their preferred explanation locates the problem within the context of organizational structures within the school, related both to an emphasis on independent learning, and observed differences in levels of social maturity between boys and girls. In this way the teachers' considerations of changes in curriculum policy and classroom practice are shaped by the way they explain and make sense of variations in achievement between boys and girls within the school.

The extract quoted above further illustrates the effects this kind of evaluation process can have on the implementation of policy. The evidence suggests that the teachers, with the information offered by the data, were able to reflect constructively on the impact their teaching policies were having on the pupils. By focusing their attention on the pupils' perspectives, the teachers could devise strategies to put their intentions into practice. The evaluation data thus provided an important knowledge base in terms of which teachers could relate their own classroom practice to a critical consideration of changes in school policy.

There is evidence of numerous examples across the eight projects of the kinds of changes referred to above. Although it is stated that the three types of outcomes - changes in perceptions of the evaluation process, teachers' practice and school policy - are interrelated in the working of the model, for illustrative purposes examples are given within each type where one aspect is seen to take priority over the others.

a) Changes in perception concerning the nature of school evaluation

The link teachers were asked to comment upon colleagues who, in their perception, had changed in their views concerning school-based evaluation as a result of the project. The following are examples of their responses:

> I am convinced that the whole business of being involved in something like this, even though you are at a meeting where there is a little bit of hassle, is important. At the end of it, they realise that there is a lot of point in getting more information about the things that you actually need in order to benefit the next year, or the next couple of years. It is imperceptible change with some people. One member of staff who I knew was anti at the beginning is probably going to change part of what her form tutors do as a result of a rethink about Health Education in relation to the National Curriculum and in relation to things we found out as a result of the evaluation. But she will never admit that this will have had any effect on her at all though she wouldn't have changed because she is the biggest stick-in-the-mud in the whole institution. But somewhere I reckon there has been an affect on her, like the dripping of water on stones.

> Well yes, I think the impact it has had is on members of staff who now see the evaluation in a different way, who now know that its part and parcel of what we should be doing. And they are people who before would have been the 'hands off' people. The kind of people who wou d have

been saying we don't want to know about it. I think the evaluation proved that its not as threatening as maybe they first thought it was.

b) Changes in perception concerning classroom practice.

Most of the changes that were identified in teachers' perceptions related to their day-to-day interactions with pupils were concerned mainly with the adoption of particular strategies for achieving desired outcomes. This is consistent with the levels of practical interpretation and technical reflection described by Tripp (1991) and Zeichner (1981) already referred to. The following extracts from the interviews with the link teachers are given as examples:

> The evaluation outlined a number of points which we actually took on board as action points. This was because the way in which we set up work experience hadn't taken into account the way children viewed certain things. For example, the children said they wanted somebody from the school to visit them on their work experience. Now we had a problem with this getting staff out to visit. But we hadn't realised how important it was in the child's perception. The staff don't utilize the experience enough. It doesn't get into the curriculum enough. The children aren't involved in the process before and after enough.

> What we've gained from the evaluation this year is that we have identified our shortcomings, which some of us were aware of and some of us were not. And we've quite clearly got a policy in force which addresses all these issues. So every tutor will now receive a tutor handbook, which not only tells them what the students are entitled to, it gives them examples of good practice that have been identified through the evaluation.

c) Changes in perception concerning whole school issues.

Regarding whole school issues, or rather issues that extended beyond subject teaching boundaries and beyond issues related specifically to classroom practice, much of what was revealed through the evaluations seemed to be confirmatory rather than unexpected or startlingly revealing. In this sense the evaluation projects were perceived in terms of giving greater clarity to issues about which questions were being raised, or to offer a slightly different perspective on everyday practices that were taken for granted. But this is the raisin d'etre of constructivist, collaborative evaluation; to enter the everyday, taken-for-granted, world of social actors and to cast it in a new light. Cohen (1985) describes this way of apprehending social reality as belonging to:

> the kind of sociology which tries to make the world look different: a strange terrain appears imperceptibly to be familiar or, just as interesting, a familiar terrain begins to look a little strange. (p 1)

The example given above of the school in which the pastoral care system became seen as an inhibiting, rather than a supportive, factor in promoting effective learning is a good example. Further examples given by the link teachers are as follows:

> And I don't think, at the end of the day, there was anything really brand new. I think we got a clearer picture of what we feared, that the tutorial system in the college is a movable feast depending on who you are, and where you are. So it confirmed and highlighted further things that people were aware of, or sensed, anyway. We also had a senior management impression that things were going well. But the evaluation identified what the staff felt; that there was a lot of work to go forward in the area. And I think it has brought home the message not to believe your own propaganda, that we are a caring institution and that we have to keep looking under the microscope to see what we are doing.

I suppose it was confirmation to a certain extent. But I think it was surprising how well the pupils did react to the situation. They reacted better than we thought they would. And I think, if you are teaching all the time, you put things to the back of your mind. And the evaluation helps to bring things out, such as the realisation that these young adults are capable of doing more things than you are giving them credit for.

So in other words we looked at the project which confirmed and strengthened certain perceptions of the staff about the role of the key subject tutor, the importance of feeling secure in your first days in the College, the importance of knowing the buildings, of how to use the resources, and how important it is to get in with a group of people you feel happy with.

In summary, the main outcomes of the evaluation concerned the impact the process had on the teachers' ability to deliberate about policy issues in relation to their own classroom practice. The evaluations were important in drawing out the mediating influences that convert policy into practice and also helped to point the way forward by indicating where changes in policy were most needed.

Effects of the Evaluation on Change Processes in the Schools

The analysis of the outcomes of the evaluation has served to demonstrate the effects that involvement in the evaluation process had for individual teachers in interrogating their own professional practice. But this was seen as a collaborative activity, not confined to teachers individually and in isolation reflecting about their own classroom practice. The nature of reflection embraced within this kind of model relates individual deliberations on

classroom practice to broader structural constraints within the institution, constraints that were related to particular policy issues. Because the evaluations, as well as focusing on teachers' particular pedagogical skills, raised questions about whole school policy, the model involved a process of dissemination and feedback in order to make the outcomes of the evaluations available to a wider audience than those teachers who had been directly involved. The main method of dissemination was through the project report.

The reports offered primarily descriptive accounts of the evaluation outcomes which had been drawn together in accordance with accepted procedures in the analysis of qualitative data. The different groups of participants - university tutors, local authority DCDP co-ordinators, link teachers, teachers in the schools - were then enabled to bring their own interpretations to the data. Being non-judgmental in this style, the reports were able to become part of the teachers' discourse in making decisions about implementing policy that would promote, in their view, good practice. The discussion with teachers not directly involved in the project could be seen as a management strategy to institute review as part of teachers' professional practice. In the majority of cases, the process of dissemination was arranged through formal management and decision making structures within the institutions. In other words, the process of dissemination became formalized, as the following extracts from the link teacher interviews illustrate:

> Copies of the final report were distributed to management team members which was followed by discussion and referred to heads of faculty, and then discussed at heads of department meetings. Everybody read the report. We circulated a limited number within faculties and then just circulated it among the people involved.

> The report was disseminated through the curriculum committee. In other words all heads of department had a copy. And it was discussed at a curriculum meeting. All senior management had a copy and again it was discussed at senior management meetings. Now those reports have gone through all the various stages, from the early discussions, to all the staff in the school through departmental meetings. Now there are certain action points from the report which we are addressing within the next twelve months. Now that's how it worked.

The extracts from the link teacher interviews quoted above, and the earlier discussion concerning the identification of evaluation issues, reveal certain important and seemingly common elements in processes of curriculum development and change across the eight institutions. Firstly, the process of setting each project up, determining action plans, identifying issues and working through and planning the collection of data, involved meetings and negotiations with teachers who operated primarily at the classroom level. They were also the main agents involved in refining the overall concerns of the evaluations into a more concrete form, such as focusing on pupils' use of unsupervised time. Secondly, and in sharp contrast with the early stages of the projects, the dissemination of the outcomes of the evaluations involved the active participation of staff members operating within the organizational and management systems in each institution.

Conclusion

The main emphasis in this paper has been on demonstrating ways in which school evaluation, based on a collaborative action research model, can be seen as a strategy for policy articulation and change. The primary purpose of the programme was to evaluate the implementation of DCDP policy in schools, but the process of engaging in this style of evaluation did more than help the

schools meet a contractual requirement. It helped to generate a climate of change in which the implementation of policy became a reality. It is contended that this outcome was facilitated by a number of central features of the collaborative action research process:

- The evaluations were owned by the teachers
- Once the overarching focus of each evaluation project had been determined, the teachers had an important say in refining and defining particular evaluation issues
- The evaluations involved working in partnership with outsiders, who were seen to promote objectivity in the collection of data, whilst remaining under the control of the schools
- The evaluations were seen by the teachers to relate either directly, or indirectly, to their own working practices
- The evaluations were facilitated by a designated co-ordinator in the school
- The evaluations focused primarily on pupil perceptions and responses to curriculum requirements and classroom processes
- By using data relating to their own practice, teachers were enabled to engage in meaningful discourse about policy issues
- Teachers directly engaged in the evaluations shared a commitment to particular policy issues and to the values implicit in the evaluation model
- The findings of the evaluations were made available to other teaching staff through a process of dissemination which made use of official management and communication procedures in the schools.

The central features of the evaluation programme identified here are found elsewhere in the school improvement literature (see for example, Reynolds, Davie and Phillips, 1989; Brighouse and Tomlinson, 1990). In this programme it is clear that the projects had an important impact on the planning and

policy making processes within the institutions. The way in which this worked seemed to rest upon a subtle interplay between a 'bottoms up' and a 'top down' management approach to change. Once a perceived need for change had been generated within the school, a more formal and structured approach became necessary for change to be implemented. Elliott (1991), in discussing innovation and change in schools, draws attention to the claim of Handy (1984) that, when policy is both determined and executed hierarchically, it is less likely to be accepted among teachers than in a management system that retains a hierarchical structure for administering policy along with a collegial structure for its generation. This view of change management in educational institutions was succinctly expressed by one of the link techers, thus:

> The important aspects of it all from my point of view is that to create change in a big place like the College you have to create some sort of climate for change.

The strength of the model described here is that it did precisely this.

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